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ABSTRACT

Parents and teachers can help children learn qualities (such as empathy, caring, kindness, and generosity) that contribute to a more peaceful environment. Children can be helped to learn the values and techniques of resolving conflicts without injuring others. We should be concerned about teaching peacemaking in order to prevent crime, drug addiction, and mental illness. Many factors encourage the development of a peaceful and caring person, including having one's basic human needs met, having a feeling of self-worth and self-respect, and understanding the need for cooperation and sharing of power and materials. Children learn to care about others and to curb their selfish impulses by modeling their behavior on that of parents, teachers, and others. While Piaget stated that children are too egocentric to empathize with another person and to act altruistically before the 5 to 7 year old stage, recent research has found that even toddlers are sometimes altruisic. Parents who convey with intensity that a child must not hurt others, explain why, and indicate the consequences of hurtful behavior have children who, from a very early age, give help to others who are distressed. There are many other ways that parents can encourage children to be peacemakers. By working for peace in a conscious way, each of us can contribute to the quality of life in our society. (CB)

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Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution in the Home

When we read articles about nuclear fears of children, see the evening news relating conflicts around the world, see increasingly violent programs on television, and hear of increasing family violence, we may sometimes wonder if the word "peace" has any meaning. The problem may seem so complex that we feel there is nothing one can do.

Gandhi has written, "If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children."

Helping children learn to show love and concern for others and to solve conflicts peacefully may be one of the most important contributions we can make in working toward peace and justice in the world.

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What Is Peace? When one thinks about conflict, one thinks about the opposite — peace. Peace is not simply the absence of conflict or war. Peace is active, not passive. It is learning the values of reconciliation and problem solving.

Quietness isn't always peace. Quietness can mean that the conflict hasn't been solved, or that the child has submitted to adult authority.

Parents and teachers can help children learn qualities such as empathy, caring, kindness, and generosity which contribute to a more peaceful environment. Children can be helped to learn the values and techniques of resolving conflicts without injuring others. They can learn the meaning of "justice" in their day-to-day associations with others.

We are part of the computer age. The computer can do many things, but it can't love us and it can't help us solve problems of interpersonal relations. We must emphasize our human qualities.

Why should we be concerned about teaching peacemaking?

All of us are concerned about a more peaceful world, and about the health, happiness, and safety of our own children and children throughout the world. In the past year or two there have been many articles published documenting the anxieties of children and youth relating to fears about their future. We must help children have a more hopeful view of the future to keep them from being cynical.

In addition to increased awareness of the nuclear fears of children, we are aware of the increased violence in our society. Statistics tell us there is a murder every 43 minutes, a rape every 19 minutes, a robbery every 20 seconds. Millions of dollars are spent

annually as a result of school vandalism. There are approximately 70,000 attacks on teachers each year.

Children encounter violence and use of force in their everyday world. For some it is occasional, for some constant. They may be attacked (unprovoked) by other children. They may be abused in their home.

Many adolescents seem to live only for today and live with great anxiety and insecurity about their future. They may use drugs or join cults as a sanctuary from their anxieties. Some researchers feel that adolescent suicide may be a direct result of little hope for the future.

There is much research on preventing crime, drug addiction, and mental illness. We must also study the principles, skills, and techniques which foster peaceful conflict resolution, caring, and love.

What are some qualities of a peacemaker?

Personal qualities which contribute to peace include empathy, smypathy, generosity, cooperation, respect for self and others, learning to be assertive in a kind way, trust, a sense of fairness and justice, and the will and ability to settle disputes without violence.

These qualities all come under the umbrella term "altruism" which has been defined as "selfless concern for the common good" or "helping others without expecting rewards." Another term used is "pro-social behavior."

There is some evidence that in our highly competetive world, parents may not really value these traits in children, but give lip service to them. Our society seems to put much value on "getting ahead at all costs" and "being happy" rather than on caring about

others. Being a peacemaker may involve some risks.

What are some factors which may contribute to a peaceful and caring person?

Factors which contribute to peace include: having one's basic human needs met, having a feeling of one's own worth and respect, and understanding the need for cooperation and sharing of power and materials. If a child does not have a warm home, adequate food, warm clothes, someone who cuddles them and changes them when they are wet, they are not likely to feel secure. If they learn that they can't trust others to care for their needs they may not feel a sense of responsibility toward others. Without a sense of trust or security it is difficult to empathize with others. A strong attachment of the infant to the mother also seems to spawn an early interest in others.

All children need to have feelings of self esteem, self-worth, or respect. They must feel "I am lovable and capable." This feeling isn't something a child has "once and for all." It is something that must be continually nurtured by the significant adults in a child's life.

Children must learn to accept and control their feelings. Our emotions are a significant part of our total being. They allow us to be affected by events. If we had no emotions we wouldn't react to persons or events because we wouldn't care. Parents need to allow children to express their emotions, gradually guiding them into understanding the most appropriate ways to react to fear, anger, frustration, sadness and love. As children recognize their own emotions, they can begin to understand how others feel and empathize with them.

How do children learn to care about others?

We all know that children don't come into the world as unselfish human beings. If you've ever had young children of your own, or been with groups of infants or toddlers, you know they don't have many social skills. They grab toys, pull the hair of a child who has something they want, bite when they are frustrated. They don't yet know or care how their actions make the other person feel. Children need adults who will help them develop positive qualities of social interaction.

Children need to be with adults such as parents, teachers, and others who model peaceful qualities. Parents who use threats or physical force serve as models for aggressive behavior. We've all seen parents who spank their child for hitting another child, thus teaching them that hitting is the way to solve problems. A parent who uses reasoning and points out the rights and wrongs of the child's action models concern for others and the effects of one's behavior on others. How parents work out conflicts will in a large measure determine how children learn to work out conflicts with others.

Peer interaction supports a child's social development. Failure to develop positive relationships with peers is related to later maladjustment. Through peer interaction the child learns to master his/her emotions. A major task of preschool child is to develop relationships with others. Being exposed to kind and generous peers can reinforce these qualities in children.

At what age can we expect children to be able to understand the qualities of kindness, empathy, sharing?

Swiss theorist Jean Piaget has written that young children are too

egocentric and selfish to empathize, to understand another's point of view and thus to act altruistically before at least age 5, 6, or 7. Recent research as well as example cited by parents and teachers indicate that young children are <u>not</u> always egocentric. Marian Yarrow, chief of the lab of Developmental Psychology at NIMH studied children between 10 months and 2 1/2 years and found that caring behaviors are promoted when parents give children a strong message that they must not hurt tothers, and when parents show altruism toward their own children.

Children tested five years later still were empathetic. Yarrow feels that the age of eighteen months seems to be a critical age for leading children in the direction of either altruism or selfishness. At this time they are learning the separateness of others' pain. Yarrow says that babies have amazingly generous impulses and many children perform acts of altruism at a very early age. Such findings challenge some traditional theories. It is gratifying in this age of "me-ism" and self gratification to find that altruism is possible in young children. In fact some sociobiologists such as Dr. E. O. Wilson at Harward, believe that both animals and humans are genetically programmed to be altruistic.

Yarrow found that between 18-24 months there were enormous differences in the amount of altruism shown by children, and that it could be related to styles of child-rearing.

Parents who conveyed <u>with intensity</u>, or with a dramatic explanation that a child must not hurt others and why, and let them know the consequences of that behavior, had children who gave help in distress.

The mother's altruism to her own children is another powerful factor. Hugs, kisses, soothing words, caring for their physical and emotional hurts frequently reappeared in children's actions to others.

If we have an expectation that young children are not able to behave altruistically, they probably won't. We often get what we expect. If parents know of the capacity for altruism in young children they can find ways of encouraging it.

What can parents do to encourage children to be peacemakers?

1. Comment on other people's feelings as you witness an event in which someone is distressed.
2. Emphasize a child's personal responsibility in situations where helping is called for.
3. Discuss situations which call for helping behavior and how it could be initiated.
4. Be warm, but demanding.
5. Give more attention to developing pro-social activities than to suppressing anti-social ones (positive vs: negative).
6. Make it a practice to help those in distress. Children will imitate these behaviors.
7. Show great concern when your child hurts another child.
8. Talk about your own feelings and the feelings of others.
9. Use reason with discipline.
10. Maintain high standards of behavior and carefully explain them to the child.
11. Help children learn to affirm each other.
12. Discuss and practice methods of problem solving. Teach children words to use to solve problems.

13. Forgive children when they make mistakes. Help them learn to forgive others who wrong them.
14. Avoid buying war toys and games.
15. Monitor movies and television programs, which have violent aspects.
16. Talk about war and peace, and what is happening in the world in conflict areas. Learn what life is like for people in other places, and what conditions can lead to war.
17. Stress cooperative play.
18. Read and tell stories about peace.
19. Encourage autonomy. Allow children to make some decisions and extablish themselves as independent thinkers and actors. Children establish a feeling of competency when they are allowed some autonomy.
20. Have peace-oriented materials in your home, such as posters, art, literature. Support groups which you think are promoting peace.
21. Cultivate friendships with other families who share your values. Cultivate friends of other races and cultures. Be a host family to international students.
22. Let your legislators hear from you on matters relating to peace. Your children will see that you are actively working toward peace.
23. Analyze how you as parents deal with conflict.

Conclusion

Parents, teachers, mental health professionals, religious leaders, citizens of the world — all of us are concerned about ways to promote peace and to lessen conflict in the world and in the home. By working for peace in a conscious way, each of us can contribute to the quality of life in our society.

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